(ii) dividing said inoculum material into subsets hereof,

(iii) supplying, when required, inoculum material subset(s) to a customer in need of a starter culture,

(iv) using, at said customer, a subset of the stock inoculum material for direct, one step inoculation of a cultivation medium for propagating the starter culture organism cells for a period of time sufficient to produce a desired amount of said cells; and

(v) harvesting the propagated cells to obtain a starter culture,

the method permitting, when steps (iv) and (v) are repeated with another subset of the stock inoculum material, the supply of starter cultures having a consistent quality.

D2 4. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the subset of the stock inoculum material in step (iv) is directly inoculated in the cultivation medium at a rate of maximum 0.1%.

D3 5. (Twice Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the amount of the subset of the stock inoculum material for direct inoculation of the cultivation medium in step (iv) provides a ratio of the CFU per g of cultivation medium, immediately after inoculation, relative to the CFU per g of the subset of the stock inoculum material being inoculated, said ratio being in the range from 1:100 to 1:100,000.

D4 6. (Once Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the cultivation medium immediately after the inoculation in step (iv) contains a number of CFU per g of cultivation medium which is at least 10^5.

D5 7. (Twice Amended) A method according to claim 1, wherein the cultivation medium in step (iv) comprises any conventional medium used for propagation of microbial cells.